



# Play It Again

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Psalms #1 | Date | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Preached by Steve Howell

## Opening

Good morning! This morning I'm excited to move on from our previous sermon series ("Fear Not") to a new sermon series. We'll be moving from a topical study back to a book of the Bible...and it's a book you're going to love, if you don't already!

Why make the shift? Three reasons:

1. I'm always partial to working through a book of the Bible because it forces us to confront **topics we might otherwise ignore**. Rather than just pick stuff we want to talk about, we discover new content and new subjects that challenge us. Such topics might be uncomfortable or unpopular, but they are God-breathed revelations we need to hear.
2. Working through a passage **prevents us from leaning on our own understanding**. There's a real danger of "spinning" or twisting the meaning of God's Word to fit my own preferences when I pick and choose the verses to share, rather than allowing the totality of a passage (aka the CONTEXT) to shape and form my beliefs.
3. More specifically to our current situation, this part of the Bible is going to be a **natural follow-up** to our "Fear Not" series. In talking about fear, we talked about the godly use of emotion – the right choices and responses to what we feel. Well, it just so happens that there is an *entire section* of Scripture that *demonstrates* the godly use of emotion, and we would be wise to consult it and learn from it!



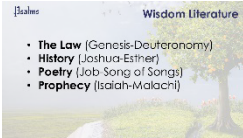
## Wisdom Literature

In your Bible, there are different groupings (sections) of Scripture. It's often helpful to know this because different sections tend to use different styles of writing to emphasize different spiritual content.

Example: In a library or bookstore, you expect different kinds of writing and information when you browse different shelves. What you find in the section of science fiction versus what you find as you browse the home repair categories will not look the same! One might have step by step instructions and lots of

pictures, the other might have long dialogues involving alien spaceships (I'll let you figure out which is which).

Since the Bible is a “library” of 66 different books, it has been grouped in a way to help us know what to expect as we read. In the Old Testament, we have four main sections: *(Students in my Basic Bible class on Wednesdays will recognize this information).*



- **The Law** (aka “Pentateuch” “Torah”): **Genesis-Deuteronomy**. Foundational material that introduces the big themes of God’s Word. The books combine history and instruction (law).
- **History: Joshua-Esther**. Covers **what** God did with the nation of Israel. It is not an all-inclusive history, but it points out some of the major actions and interactions God had with this nation as He advanced His plan of salvation.
- *(Skip Over – we’ll come right back to this)*
- **Prophecy: Isaiah-Malachi**. God’s statements about his plans and preferences in the present and future. We get to hear **why** God did what He did... or will do what He will do. This section of Scripture gives us a window into God’s heart.

In between the books of History and Prophecy, we find that section of Scripture we mentioned earlier – the one we’re going to begin studying. This is the one that demonstrates the *godly use of emotion*.

- **Poetry** (aka “wisdom literature”): **Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs**. Shows mankind’s godly reaction to the actions of God. As people live through the “what,” they give us a glimpse of the “**how**” – how to live, how to respond, how to react, how to honor God through the ups and downs and ins and outs of life.



This is the section I want to consult, and specifically I want to look at the book of...(drumroll)... **Psalms!**

*(I know it’s not shocking...we have posters, you can read it in your bulletin. But humor me... PSALMS! HOORAY!!!!)*

**Side Note:** You might remember starting this earlier this year. We had a plan to study Psalms in 2023 – using it as a transition between other series, taking a week here and a week there to look at it. We did one sermon, but the plan changed as we went through our staffing adjustments. Nevertheless, the idea to study it was good, so we’re running with it.

**Also, Side Note:** While we did cover the entire book of Acts this year, one chapter per week, please be aware that we will *not* apply that same schedule to Psalms. This is NOT a three-year,150-week sermon series!

In October and November, I want us to grow in our knowledge of this book. We will gain an appreciation for its arrangement and beauty, but we will also learn to use it as a training ground for how we manage our emotions in a godly way.

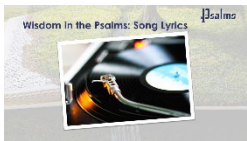
Psalms will cover a wider range of emotions than “fear,” and my goal is to help you see the range of Psalms, to help you learn to read them well, and to help you cultivate a brain that thinks like them!

That won’t happen just because of what I preach...it will only happen as God transforms your heart and mind. So, let’s ask for His Spirit to guide us as we begin:

### ***Prayer***

*Almighty God, you have provided the Wisdom Literature of the Bible to help us gain wisdom – to learn to rightly apply the truths we know. It is my prayer that you would guide our study, that you would speak through the words of these Biblical songs, and that you would shape us and mold us as we listen. Amen!*

## ***Wisdom in the Book of Psalms***



Psalms is poetry, but it is a special kind of poetry. It is a collection of **song lyrics!** The original Hebrew title of the book is “Tehillim,” which means “songs of praise.” When it was translated into Greek, the translators opted just to use the title “Psalms” which comes from the Greek word meaning “song with a musical instrument.”

***Fun Fact:*** *When talking about the book as a whole, you can call it The Book of Psalms or simply Psalms. But each chapter is its own “psalm” or “song.” So, when you reference a chapter in this book, you normally use the singular form (ex: Psalm 23).*

These songs were written over the course of a thousand years, spanning the history and circumstances of the Israelite people as recorded in the Bible. They were written by a variety of authors, with tradition ascribing many of them to David, the second king of Israel (of Goliath and Bathsheba fame).

The whole book is divided into five sections, with an order that seems to defy any clear, obvious arrangement. It seems to be a collection of collections – a Spotify playlist cobbled together over centuries. The result may not seem organized, but in some ways, the disarray reflects its subject matter of the human heart as it approaches God.

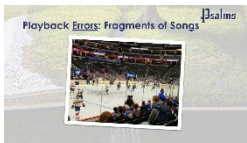
These poems were intended to be sung. The music associated with them has disappeared. We don’t know what they originally sounded like. Yet what remains – one hundred fifty chapters of song lyrics – isn’t *diminished* by the lack of chord charts. The lyrics, the words, are still meaningful today.

This collection gives us a window into Israel’s true faith and love for God through the years. The effect of these 150 songs, joined together in one book, functions like a “photo mosaic” picture – hundreds or thousands of pictures combined to make a single

image. In the Psalms, we see individual songs...but the **overall effect** shows us the true heart and faith of Israel when they trust in Yahweh.

## Playback Errors

So, now we have a broad overview of the Book of Psalms...but let's bring this back to the godly use of emotion – the right *choices* and *responses* to what we feel. The Book of Psalms is going to play a big role in helping us do this properly...but we must listen to the songs in the right way!



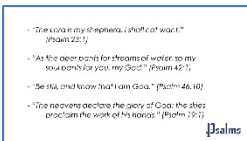
## Fragments of Songs

Ex: If you ever attend a professional sporting event, you know that you will get bombarded by sound! You have the roar of the crowd, of course, but you also have songs pumped in during every break in the action. These songs are often chosen for a specific purpose, depending on the situation at hand. Some are chosen because they are musically intense (ex: the opening to “Crazy Train” by Ozzy or “Machinehead” by Bush). Others are chosen because they have a particular phrase that applies to the situation (SNAP! claims “*I got the power...*” or EMF proclaims “*You’re unbelievable. Ohhh!!!*” or Journey tells us to “*Don’t Stop Believin’*”).

The crowd loves it! They sing along to the music and turn it into karaoke night between innings or after a big play.

But I always laugh and/or shake my head when the songs get going...because the content and context of the music don’t REALLY align with the situation. Trailing by a touchdown late in the fourth quarter, you’ll hear them play the opening lines of “Don’t Stop Believin.’” You know them? “*Just a small-town girl livin’ in a lonely world...*” Those lines don’t have much to do with believing your team can rally to tie up the game! Yes, that *singular phrase* of “*Don’t Stop Believin’*” might fit...but only if we’re ignoring the context!

It's a little silly, but we do the same thing with Psalms. We are familiar with a lot of phrases and lyrics in the Biblical songs. They have some amazing, deep content!



- “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” (Psalm 23:1)
- “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.” (Psalm 42:1)
- “Be still, and know that I am God.” (Psalm 46:10)
- “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” (Psalm 19:1)

Such verses have weight, and they can impact our emotional situations. In fact, since we know that these passages from Psalms can pack a punch, some well-meaning Christians put together lists of them to guide us to emotional health. They write articles like:

- “5 Psalms to pray when you’re feeling depressed”
- “8 Psalms to claim when you feel like you can’t take one more thing.”
- “15 Beloved Psalms for Healing”

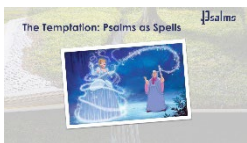
In the back of many Bibles, you might find a similar appendix of passages for specific moments.

- “When you feel sad... Read Psalm 27”
- “When you are impatient... Read Psalm 40”
- “When you are feeling attacked... Read Psalm 120”

Is this wrong?

Well, I would never say that it is wrong to look at Scripture! The Bible IS the best place to go. These verses may very well apply to the situation or emotion described. But lurking within those lists is a dangerous mindset we need to handle cautiously.

## *The Temptation: Psalms as Spells*



If we are searching for the perfect line or phrase to use in a situation, we run the risk of treating Scripture as a type of spell book. That’s a strong statement, but am I wrong?

What are spells – whether in cartoons or fantasy or in a darker spiritual place? They are ‘magic words’ that are supposed to manipulate and change the situation.

- You say the magic words “Wingardium Leviosa” and something stationary can now fly.
- You say the magic words “Bibbidi Bobbidi Boo” and now you can ride in a pumpkin carriage to the ball and dance with your prince....until midnight.
- You say the magic words “please and thank you” and now you get a juice box.

There is a temptation to use the Psalms in a similar way. Read *these words* or stanzas, and you can now fight loneliness! Read *this Psalm* and you can now face your fear!

But the Psalms are not spells! You cannot read the lyrics of an ancient song and change the situation. You can’t manipulate God into fixing your circumstances just because you “claim” a verse as your own.

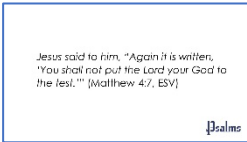


In fact, to do so is insulting and low...stooping to Satan’s level! When Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness in Matthew 4, what does he do? He tries to get Jesus to claim a passage from Psalms and treat it like a spell!

*“Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “ ‘He will command his angels concerning you,’ and “ ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’ ”” (Matthew 4:5–6, ESV)*

Satan quotes a couple of lines from Psalm 91:11-12 and says to Jesus, "Use these lines to change your reality!"

But Jesus rebukes Satan and models a better way to handle Scripture. He does use a counter-quote in response...



*"Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.' "" (Matthew 4:7, ESV)*

...but Jesus isn't just battling Satan by slinging spells (verses); He is approaching the situation with a better perspective. He is thinking *godly thoughts*.

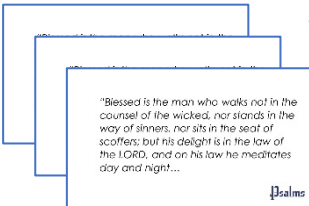
## ***Training to Think: Psalm 1***



What Jesus does with Satan is what we need to do with our emotions: approach them with our mind *focused on* God and *attuned to* God. We must train ourselves to think *rightly*.

The opening song in the Book of Psalms discusses this approach:

### ***PSALM 1:1-6***



#### **1 *Blessed is the man***

*who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*

*2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

*3 He is like a tree  
planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.*

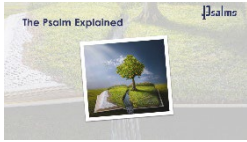
*In all that he does, he prospers.*

*4 The wicked are not so,  
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*

*5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;*

*6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.*

## The Psalm Explained



Psalm 1 describes two different types of people: the righteous and the wicked. And it wisely tries to steer us to be like the former instead of the latter.

In the second half of the Psalm, we find a wicked person. He is tossed around and unstable. He is unable to thrive in respectable places and situations; he is unsuited for being a role model. He is destined for failure and destruction.

But in the first half of the Psalm, we find a good individual ("man," but clearly in the sense of any human). He is in a far better position. He is "blessed" or "happy" (literally "O the joy!"), much like the words of the Beatitudes ("blessed are the poor, meek, etc").

This wise, righteous person *avoids* certain things:

- He avoids listening to the advice of ungodly people (*he turns off cable news*)
- He avoids copying the behaviors of sinful people (*he stops chasing trends*)
- He avoids mocking and making fun of others (*he keeps his mouth shut*)

Instead, the wise and righteous person focuses all *attention* and *affection* on God's Word!

- He enjoys the law...it becomes something that brings pleasure to his life.
- He values the law...it becomes an ongoing priority.

This wise person is solid and stable in a place of beauty, producing good things at the right time!

What is the major difference between the righteous and the wicked? Listen to it one more time:

### **1** *Blessed is the man*

*who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*

<sup>2</sup> *but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

<sup>3</sup> *He is like a tree  
planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season,  
and its leaf does not wither.*

*In all that he does, he prospers.*

<sup>4</sup> *The wicked are not so,*

*but are like chaff that the wind drives away.*

<sup>5</sup> *Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;*

<sup>6</sup> *for the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.*

The righteous person has been training his mind. Instead of trying to use a singular verse like a spell, the righteous person engages in ongoing “meditation” on the totality of God’s Word so that he knows the way of God, and so God knows the way of this righteous person.

We train our minds to think godly thoughts through godly “meditation.”



## ***Biblical Meditation***

Now, the word “meditation” has some unwelcome connotations in the church. It has echoes of far east mysticism or new age practices. But it shouldn’t be feared. Meditation is a biblical concept.

Biblical meditation is a word that can denote inward or outward focus – it can refer to thinking (inward) or talking (outward). The emphasis isn’t on the direction; it is on the duration. It is ongoing. It is constant.

## ***Actions***

I can “meditate on” or “constantly discuss” the **actions of God**.

*“I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.”*

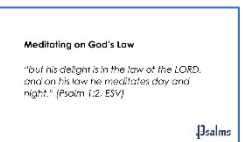
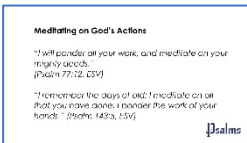
(Psalm 77:12, ESV)

*“I remember the days of old; I meditate on all that you have done; I ponder the work of your hands.”* (Psalm 143:5, ESV)

In meditating, I remember...and maybe help others remember... the blessings God has given in the past. I can call to mind the times He has been faithful, the times when His way ended up being better than what I asked, the tough times and situations He pulled me through. I can remember the promises He has made and the actions he has accomplished.

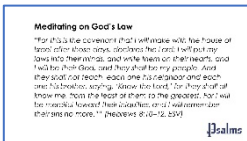
## ***Law***

I can also – as we read in Psalm 1:2 – meditate on the **words of God**. He has given His Word, His Law, as a revelation for mankind. “Day and night” I can consider the things that He has said. It can be an ongoing conversation with my family, a Bible study in the church, a text thread with my friends, or a running thought in my head. It is an intentional appreciation and consideration of the words He has spoken.





Meditation is the way we should handle the Bible, including the Psalms. We should never treat them as “spells” to quote, but we should be formed by our ongoing meditation on them to create a way of godly thinking. The result will be like what the prophet Jeremiah predicted and what the author of Hebrews quoted in reference to the church:



*“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws **into their minds**, and write them **on their hearts**, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for **they shall all know me**, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more.”*  
(Hebrews 8:10–12, ESV)

## Thinking the Right Things

“O, the joy!” of thinking that way!

I want all of us to be formed and transformed by the knowledge of God! I want you to know Him! And so, I want you to use Psalms as a training ground for how to manage your emotions in a godly way – a way that draws you closer to Him. Not with a quick fix, but with an ongoing exposure to the kind of thinking you should develop. You don’t need a quote; you need a transformation.



Ex: I watched a video<sup>1</sup> recently with an actor from the WWII production “Band of Brothers.” The actor was talking about his process of preparing for the role. And he wasn’t just playing a fictional soldier in the film – he was trying to represent a real-life hero from Easy Company in the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne, a man named Frank Perconte.

How did he prepare? He “meditated” on the man he was portraying (my word, not his). He started reading all he could about this group of soldiers. He had a binder prepared by the production company with all the info they had on Frank. And at the back of the binder, it had the real-life Frank’s phone number! James, the actor, was a little nervous making that call because he didn’t know how the real-life Frank would respond, but it was great! They talked. They got together. And by spending time with him, James the actor had a better idea of the personality and the habits and the attitude he should convey when on screen. (Case in point, the first scene he filmed was supposed to have him smoking a cigarette; but the actor knew that real-life Frank never smoked one in his life! Small change, but he got it right).

James, the actor, could have just used the words (the lines); but he was better when he took the time to think like his namesake.

<sup>1</sup> [Band of Brothers Actor on Filming Iconic WWII Miniseries | James Madio - YouTube](#)



This is how it works with Psalms. You can memorize a few words in a verse. You can look at the appendix in your Bible when you're sad and pick a psalm to read.

...or...

You can train yourself to think the right way! You can meditate on God's ways and think like Him and act accordingly. You can spend time exploring the whole book of Psalms, pondering the godly examples they offer BEFORE you are in the same situation. You can prepare for when you will need to respond to the emotional challenges of the future.

When you play the songs again and again, the type of thinking they model can and will change your life!

## *Mental and Emotional Health*

Psalms will cover a wider range of emotions than "fear." It's going to touch on anger, loneliness, depression, joy, devotion, doubt, opposition, faith, and more. These are issues I know you deal with. You might deal with a small amount of the emotion, or you might carry a huge burden.

Clearly a lot more of us are dealing with these issues than before. Just a couple weeks ago, an article in Forbes shared the following:

*From 2019 to 2022, usage of mental healthcare services—for anxiety disorders, PTSD, major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia—increased by 38.8% among adults with private insurance, according to a study published Friday in JAMA Health Forum.<sup>2</sup>*

Whatever the cause, the dollars don't lie. A lot more people are feeling mental and emotional pressure!

- I'm not going to tell you that you're weak if you struggle and strong if you don't.
  - o Issues hit different people at different times for different reasons. Some chemical, some behavioral, some situational, and some spiritual.
- I'm not going to tell you that reading the Psalms will instantly fix it.
  - o If that was the case, we could make some serious cash selling Bibles!
- I'm not going to tell you that you can just think your way out of it.
  - o These issues don't always care about logic.

But I AM going to tell you that Jesus understands what you're going through, and that the best way to be equipped for it is to be TRAINED to think like He did: cultivating a godly mind, thinking godly thoughts, challenging the Enemy's claims through a deeper knowledge of God Himself.

God wants to see you solid, rooted in the word, planted by streams of living water, and yielding fruit as a church. He wants you to be thinking godly thoughts.

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<sup>2</sup> [Mental Health Spending Surged Over 50% In U.S. Since Start Of Pandemic, Study Shows \(forbes.com\)](https://www.forbes.com)

Our study in Psalms will begin to create that. My job is to help you see the emotional range of Psalms, help you learn to read them well, and help you cultivate a brain that thinks like them.

Your job, then, is to put in the work and *meditate* on these things as we learn them (not just quoting a phrase, but embracing the whole body of work)!

Let's gain true wisdom from these songs as we play them over and over again in our heads and hearts! Let's train ourselves to think rightly!



## ***PRAYER***

# **Invitation**

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If you are struggling with any emotional burden, let us walk beside you as you meditate on God's Word and His promises. Allow us to pray for you and with you.

As we stand and sing, during the song feel free to come up and share what's on your heart so we can pray for you in your situation...whether it's a prayer request, or a pull from Jesus to come and know Him as your Lord and Savior.

Come forward while we sing.

## ***PRAYER REQUESTS:***

# Notes

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## **Wisdom Literature**

*Wisdom in the Book of Psalms*

## **Playback Errors**

*Fragments of Songs* (Psalm 23:1; 42:1; 46:10; 19:1)

*The Temptation: Psalms as Spells* (Matthew 4:5-7)

## **Training to Think: Psalm 1**

*Psalm 1:1-6*

*The Psalm Explained*

*Biblical Meditation*

*Actions* (Psalm 77:12; 143:5)

*Law* (Hebrews 8:10-12)

## **Thinking the Right Things**

*Mental and Emotional Health*

# Sermon Discussion ?s

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Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.

## ***Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose***

- Do you typically pay more attention to lyrics or instruments when listening to songs? Which is more important (words or music)? Why?
- Do you have an important connection to a certain song? If you are comfortable, share the song and the reason it touches your heart.

## ***Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters***

- What experience do you have with Psalms in worship? How have these songs impacted your own praise? Which ones are your favorites? Why?
- Psalms is part of a poetic section of the Old Testament known as “wisdom literature.” How do you define wisdom? Have you ever thought about Psalms as a source of wisdom? Why or why not?
- Are you more likely to read through this collection from start to finish, or would you choose individual psalms to read randomly? Why?
- What is the danger of only using quotes or verses rather than the full context of a song? Read Psalm 73:13-14, then read all of Psalm 73. How does the context change your understanding?
- When is the best time to read a Psalm: *while* you are facing a situation that parallels the songwriter's, or *before*? Explain.
- How did Satan try to use out-of-context Psalms to tempt Jesus? Read Matthew 4:5-7. Was Jesus' reaction based only on the verse He shared, or was it based on anything deeper? How did Jesus' knowledge of God's mind help him to resist?
- Read Psalm 1. What does biblical meditation look like? Are you good at it, or still growing? What are some ways you can dwell on God's Word “day and night?”
- Which emotions do you struggle with most? (Ex: depression, anxiety, fear) Do you trust God's word to help you in this struggle? Who can you talk to about it? List 1-2 Christian friends who can help you think godly thoughts.

## ***Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God***

- Pray for the habit of reading Psalms to become ingrained in your routine. Ask for insight as you try to understand the songs you read!